

Hello, my name is Kimberly Smith. I am a registered voter in Bozrah Connecticut, and I am an Advocate at the Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut. DNEC is one of five Independent Living Centers in Connecticut. We serve all of New London and Windham counties and part of Tolland county. At DNEC, I help people with disabilities of all ages remain independent within our community.

In the eighteen months that I have worked at DNEC, I have assisted people with housing, home modifications, assistive technology, ramps, stairlifts, and applying for benefits such as cash assistance, health insurance, SNAP, and Social Security Disability. Some of the people we assist, are struggling due to the COVID 19 Pandemic. They are being forced to choose between paying bills such as rent and electricity and purchasing essential items such as food and personal care items.

One person I assisted had worked extensively with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services trying to find employment after the company he had worked for for 30 years laid him off due to restructuring. Prior to working with BRS, he applied for SSDI, only to have his application denied due to his work history. He worked with BRS for several years, however, it was determined that he was unable to work in a competitive work environment. This left him with no job and no income other than SNAP benefits. He was reliant on his brother's inheritance to meet all of his other needs. I assisted my consumer with applying for SSDI again. Due to being able to provide documentation previously unavailable, his application was not only approved, but it was retroactive to first time he had applied five years prior. This consumer now has his own income and is no longer dependent on his brother.

When compared to other states in our area, Connecticut has one of the lowest amounts of funding available for our Independent Living Centers. Our centers are understaffed which causes our Advocates to become burnt out. If the centers are allocated more funds, they would be able to hire more staff and maybe even be able to open more offices. The most important thing is they would be able to help even more people. For that reason, I am asking that our funding be increased by one million dollars so that we can help those in our community who have the greatest risk of losing their independence.

Thank you

